

Dragonquest, by Anne McCaffrey.

Editions used for comparison:

American: DelRey, eISBN: 978-0-345-45396-9 v3.0_r2.

GB: Transworld/Corgi, Version 1.0 Epub ISBN 9781448127924 ISBN 9780552116350.

The changes are deleted scenes from the GB/Commonwealth text with a rewrite of a deleted scene to a shortened passage. I have not noted all single sentence changes or when words have been changed from American English to GB English (EG color > colour; realize > realise).

American changes are highlighted in GREEN and GB/Commonwealth changes are highlighted in YELLOW.

GB/Commonwealth page numbers refer to: Rapp Whiting hc, Sphere 1974 pb, Corgi 1993 reprint.

American page numbers refer to: DelRey pb, 11th reprint, 1979.

Word count:

US 116470 - UK 108610 = 7860

1164.7 1%

7860 / 1165 = 6.75% difference.

PXV DelRey pb	
and only one Weyr of dragonriders left on Pern. The Red Star wasn't due back for a long, long while. Why worry about such distant possibilities? In five generations or so,	and only one Weyr of dragonriders left on Pern. In five generations or so,

Ch1

P2 DelRey pb	RW p16 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Sp p16 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Corgi p24 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
enlisted their enthusiastic aid. It had not been just a sudden resurgence of forgotten loyalties that had prompted the Lords, but the all too real sense of disaster as they envisioned their prosperous acres blackened with the Thread they had dismissed as myth, of the thought of burrows of the lightning propagating parasites, of themselves walled up in the cliff-Holds behind thick metal doors and shutters. They'd been ready to promise F'lar their souls that day if he could protect them from Thread. And it was Lessa who had bought them that protection, almost with her life.	enlisted their enthusiastic aid. Robinton looked up from the sandtrays, his expression suddenly bleak.	

Robinton looked up from the sandtrays, his expression suddenly bleak		
<p><u>P5 DelRey pb</u></p> <p>Or was he perhaps unnecessarily worried about these minor irritations between Lord Holder and Weyrleader? But without the dragonriders of Pern, the land would be sucked dry of any sustenance by Thread, even if every man, woman and child of the planet were armed with flame throwers. One burrow, well established, could race across plain and forest as fast as a dragon could fly it, consuming everything that grew or lived, save solid rock, water or metal. Robinton shook his head, annoyed with his own fancies. As if dragonmen would ever desert Pern and their ancient obligation.</p> <p>Now—a solid beat on the biggest drum for Fandarel, the Mastersmith,</p>	<p><u>RW p19 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Sp p19 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Corgi p27 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></u></p> <p>Or was he perhaps unnecessarily worried about these minor irritations between Lord Holder and Weyrleader? Now – a solid beat on the biggest drum for Fandarel, the Mastersmith</p>	
<p><u>P7 DelRey pb</u></p> <p>In his Turn, the Silver Thread of those teaching songs had not dropped from the Red Star for over four hundred Turns, to sear the flesh of man and beast and devour anything living which grew on Pern. Of all the dragonmen in Pern's lone Weyr only F'nor's half-brother, F'lar, bronze Mnementh's rider, had believed that there might be truth in those old legends. Now Thread was an inescapable fact, falling to Pern from the skies with diurnal regularity. Once more, its destruction was a way of life for dragonriders. The lessons these lads learned would save their skins</p>	<p><u>RW 21 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Sp p21 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Corgi p30 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></u></p> <p>In his Turn, the Silver Thread of those teaching songs had not dropped from the Red Star for over four hundred Turns. The lessons these lads learned would save their skins</p>	
Ch 2		
<p><u>P24 DelRey pb</u></p> <p>and nothing would be accomplished. Nadira of Igen Weyr liked Lessa but in a passive way. Bedella of Telgar Weyr was stupid and Fauna of Ista, taciturn. Merika of the High Reaches was as much a sour sort as her Weyrleader T'kul.</p> <p>This was a matter for men to settle.</p>	<p><u>RW p36 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Sp p36 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Corgi p50 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></u></p> <p>and nothing would be accomplished. This was a matter for men to settle.</p>	
<u>P24 DelRey pb</u>	<u>RW p37 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Sp p37 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Corgi p50 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></u>	

Undoubtedly the Fort Weyrwoman was sulking beyond the curtain between weyr and sleeping room. Maybe this awkward time had been her idea. It was after western dinner hours and too late for more than wine for those from later time zones. She thus avoided the necessity of playing hostess.

Lessa would never resort to such mean-spirited strategies. F'lar knew how often the impulsive Lessa had bitten back quick answers when Mardra had patronized her. In fact, Lessa's forbearance with the haughty Fort Weyrwoman was miraculous, considering Lessa's temper. F'lar supposed that his Weyrmate felt responsible for uprooting the Oldtimers. But the final decision to go forward in time had been theirs.

Well, if Lessa could endure Mardra's condescension out of gratitude, F'lar could try to put up with T'ron. The man did know how to fight Thread effectively and F'lar had learned a great deal from him at first. So, in a determinedly pleasant frame of mind, F'lar walked down the short passage to the Fort Weyr Council Room.

Undoubtedly the Fort Weyrwoman was sulking beyond the curtain between weyr and sleeping room. Enough of such futile speculations, thought F'lar and walked down the short passage to the Fort Weyr Council Room.

Ch 3

P40 DelRey pb

Why did F'nor have to be absent at a time like this? It still rankled F'lar deeply that Fort's Weyrleader had tried to shift the blame of the fight from his very guilty rider to Terry. Of all the specious, contrived, ridiculous contentions for T'ron to stand by!

Lamanth is flying well, the bronze dragon remarked, cutting into his rider's thoughts.

F'lar was so surprised at the unexpected diversion that he glanced down to see the young queen.

"We're lucky to have so many to fly today," F'lar said, amused despite his other concerns by the bronze's fatuous tone. Lamanth was the queen from Mnementh's second mating with Ramoth. Ramoth flies well too, for one so soon from the Hatching Ground.

RW p50 / Sp p50 / Corgi p67

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F'lar was so surprised at the unexpected diversion that he glanced down to see the young queen.

Ramoth flies well too, for one so soon from the Hatching Ground.

P44 DelRey pb

many would never lose their fearfulness. Dragons were confused by this distrust so that F'lar strolled casually to his bronze and scratched the left eye ridge affectionately until Mnementh allowed

RW p55 / Sp p55 / Corgi p73

many would never lose their fearfulness. The runner had come from afar, managing to gasp out his reassuring message

one lid to droop in pleasure over the gleaming opalescent eye.
The runner had come from afar, managing to gasp out his reassuring message

P58 DelRey pb

He held her close, all too aware that she was right. And yet . . .
There had been that long and lonely wait until he and Mnementh could come into their own. The terrible dichotomy of confidence in his own prophecy that Thread would fall and fear that nothing would rescue the Dragonriders from their lethargy. Then the crushing realization that those all too few dragonmen were all that could save an entire world from destruction; the three days of torture between the initial fall over the impending one at Nerat Hold and Telgar Hold with Lessa who-knew-where. Did he not have a right to relax his vigilance? Some freedom from the weight of responsibility?

RW p68 / Sp p68 / Corgi p90

He held her close, all too aware that she was right. And yet . . . Did he not have a right to relax his vigilance? Some freedom from the weight of responsibility?

Ch 4

P70 DelRey pb

Lemos Hold's wide forests. F'nor was disturbed to learn that R'mart of Telgar Weyr had been badly scored. He was not surprised that T'kul of High Reaches Weyr hadn't even bothered to inform his contemporaries of the unexpected falls over his weyrbound territories. But he had to agree that he would have worried had he known. He was worried now but it sounded as if F'lar was coping with his usual ingenuity. At least the Oldtimers had been roused. Took Thread to do it.

"I don't understand T'bor's remark about our not caring what happens in this part of the world . . ."

Brekke put her hand on his arm appealingly. "It's not easy to live with Kylara, particularly when it amounts to exile."

"Don't I just know it!" F'nor had had his run-ins with Kylara when she was still at Benden Weyr and, like many other riders, had been relieved when she'd been made Weyrwoman at Southern. The only problem with convalescing here in Southern, however, was her proximity. For F'nor's peace, her interest in Meron of Nabol couldn't have been more fortunate.

"You can see how much T'bor has made out of Southern Weyr in

RW p79 / Sp p79 / Corgi p104

Lemos Hold's wide forests. But it sounded as if F'lar was coping with his usual ingenuity. At least the Oldtimers had been roused. Took Thread to do it.

F'nor flexed his bandaged arm.

the Turns he's been Weyrleader here," Brekke went on. F'nor nodded, honestly impressed. "Did he ever complete the exploration of the southern continent?" He couldn't recall any report on the matter coming in to Benden Weyr. "I don't think so. The deserts to the west are terrible. One or two riders got curious but the winds turned them back. And eastward, there's just ocean. It probably extends right around to the desert. This is the bottom of the earth, you know." F'nor flexed his bandaged arm.

Ch 6

P119 DelRey pb

"Tell them again, Weyrwoman, tell them exactly how they are to capture these fire lizards."

It never troubled Kylara that even after nine Turns in a Weyr and seven Turns as a Weyrwoman herself, she could not have given the criteria by which one candidate was accepted by a dragon and another, discernibly as worthy, was rejected by an entire Hatching. Nor why the queens invariably chose women raised outside the Weyr. (For instance, at the time that boy-thing Brekke had Impressed WIRENTH, there had been three other girls, any of whom Kylara would have thought considerably more interesting to a dragonette queen. But WIRENTH had made a skyline directly to the craftbred girl. The three rejected candidates had remained at SOUTHERN WEYR—any girl in her right mind would—and one of them, Varena, had been presented at the next queen Impression and taken. One simply couldn't judge.) Generally speaking, weyrbred lads were always acceptable at one Hatching or another, for a weyrboy could attend Hatchings until he was in his twentieth Turn. No one was ever required to leave his Weyr, but those few who did not become riders usually left, finding places in one of the crafts. Now, of course, with BENDEN and SOUTHERN WEYRS producing more dragons' eggs than the weyrwomen bore babies, it was necessary to range PERN to find enough candidates to stand on the Hatching Grounds. Evidently a commoner simply couldn't realize that the dragons, usually the browns or bronzes, did the choosing, not their riders.

There seemed to be no accounting for draconic tastes. A well-

RW p123 /Sp p123 /Corgi p160

'Tell them again, Weyrwoman, tell them exactly how they are to capture these fire lizards.'

'You don't capture them,' Kylara corrected Meron with a malicious smile

favored commoner might find himself passed over for the skinny, the unattractive, Kylara looked around the hall at the variety of anxious expressions on the rough men assembled. It could be hoped that fire lizards weren't as discriminating as dragons for there wasn't much to offer them in this motley group. Then Kylara remembered that that brat of Brekke's had Impressed three. In that case, anything on two legs in this room would stand a chance. It had been handed them, their one big opportunity to prove that dragonkind did not need special qualities for Impression, that common Pernese of Holds and Crafts need only be exposed to dragons to have the same chance as the elite of the Weyrs.

"You don't capture them," Kylara corrected Meron with a malicious smile.

Ch7

P125 DelRey pb

The man was a sieve for wine. Around midnight Fandarel had left, taking his treasure of a contraption. Lessa had wagered that he'd never go to bed, and likely no one in his Hall would either. After extracting a promise from F'lar that he'd get some rest soon, too, she'd retired.

He had meant to, but Robinton knew so much about the different Holds, which minor Holders were important in swaying their Lords' mind—essential information if F'lar was going to effect a revolution. Reverence for the older rider was part of weyrlife, and respect for the able Threadfighter. Seven Turns back, when F'lar had realized humbly how inadequate was Pern's one Weyr, Benden, and how ill-prepared for actual Threadfighting conditions, he had ascribed many virtues to the Oldtimers which were difficult—now—for him arbitrarily to sweep away. He—and all Benden's dragonriders—had learned the root of Threadfighting from the Oldtimers. Had learned the many tricks of dodging Thread, gauging the varieties of Fall, of conserving the strength of beast and rider, of turning the mind from the horrors of a full scoring or a phosphine emission too close. What F'lar didn't realize was how his Weyr and the Southerners had improved on the teaching; improved and surpassed, as they could on the larger, stronger, more intelligent contemporary dragons.

RW p127 /Sp p127 /Corgi p165

The man was a sieve for wine.
The cool air – the sun was not full on the Bowl yet – reminded

F'lar had been able, in the name of gratitude and loyalty to his peers, to ignore, forget, rationalize the Oldtimers' shortcomings. He could do so no longer as the weight of their insecurity and insularity forced him to reevaluate the results of their actions. In spite of this disillusionment, some part of F'lar, that inner soul of a man which requires a hero, a model against which to measure his own accomplishments, wanted to unite all the dragonmen; to sweep away the Oldtimers' intractable resistance to change, their tenacious hold on the outmoded.

Such a feat rivaled his other goal—and yet, the distance separating Pern and the Red Star was only a different sort of step between. And one man had to take if he was ever to free himself of the yoke of Thread.

The cool air—the sun was not full on the Bowl yet—reminded

Ch 8

P144 DelRey pb

"Why not? Of course, once we tell them that's not how it's done, they may conform to time-honored couplings."

"What I meant was, if the fire lizards—who seem to be miniature dragons—can be Impressed by anyone who approaches them at the crucial moment, then fighting dragons—not just queens who don't chew firestone anyhow—could be Impressed by women, too."

"Fighting Thread is hard work. Leave it to men."

"You think managing a Weyr isn't hard work?" Brekke kept her voice even but her eyes darkened angrily. "Or plowing fields and hollowing cliffs for Holds? And . . ."

F'nor whistled. "Why, Brekke, such revolutionary thoughts from a craftbred girl?"

RW p143 /Sp p143 /Corgi p187

'Why not? Of course, once we tell them that's not how it's done, they may conform to time-honoured couplings.'

F'nor whistled. "Why, Brekke, such revolutionary thoughts from a craftbred girl?"

P145 DelRey pb

"No. You go. WIRENTH'S waking. I'll wait."

F'nor was relieved that she preferred to stay. He didn't want her to come out with that drastic theory in front of F'lar, particularly when he wanted his half-brother to shift N'ton and B'dor here for her sake. Anything to spare Brekke the kind of scene Kylara would throw if T'bor's Orth flew WIRENTH.

"Where is everyone?"

RW p143 /Sp p143 /Corgi p187

"No. You go. WIRENTH'S waking. I'll wait."

'Where is everyone?'

<p><u>P145 DelRey pb</u> T'bor landed and strode toward the waiting men. Perhaps Brekke was not so far off in her heretical doctrine, F'nor thought. T'bor had made Southern Weyr self-sufficient and productive, no small task. He'd obviously have made a good Holder. "Orth said you were here,</p>	<p><u>RW p144 ✓/Sp p144 ✓/Corgi p188 ✓</u> T'bor landed and strode toward the waiting men. 'Orth said you were here,</p>
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<p><u>P146 DelRey pb</u> They were aloft in one great leap. "Orth looks well," F'lar said and then eyed his half-brother closely, before he smiled, jabbing a fist affectionately at F'nor's good shoulder. "You do, too. How's the arm healing?" "I'm at Southern," F'nor replied in oblique explanation. "Are Threadfalls really that erratic?"</p>	<p><u>RW p145 ✓/Sp p145 ✓/Corgi p188 ✓</u> They were aloft in one great leap. 'Are Threadfalls really that erratic?'</p>
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<p><u>P151 DelRey pb</u> Dragons could adjust the focus of their eyes to either great distances or close inspection. Something moved—away, the dragon said. The gusts of his backwinging flattened grasses. Then F'lar saw the pin-sized, black-rimmed punctures of Thread on the leaves of the berry bushes. He stared hard, trying to discern the telltale evidence of burrows, the upheaval of soil, the consumption of the lush swamp greenery. The bush, the grass, the soil stood still. "What moved?" Something bright. It's gone. Mnementh landed, his feet sinking into the oozing terrain.</p>	<p><u>RW p149 ✓/Sp p149 ✓/Corgi p194 ✓</u> Dragons could adjust the focus of their eyes to either great distances or close inspection. Mnementh landed, his feet sinking into the oozing terrain.</p>
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<p><u>P155 DelRey pb</u> Somehow that aspect of the day's encounter unsettled F'lar the most. Rather than delve into that, F'lar judged it time to land. He didn't relish the thought of confronting Kylara, but he hadn't had the chance to tell T'bor what had been happening north. "I told you," Kylara was saying in sullen anger,</p>	<p><u>RW p152 ✓/Sp p152 ✓/Corgi p198 ✓</u> Somehow that aspect of the day's encounter unsettled F'lar the most. 'I told you,' Kylara was saying in sullen anger</p>
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<p><u>P156 DelRey pb</u></p>	<p><u>RW p153 ✓/Sp p153 ✓/Corgi p199 ✓</u></p>
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Prideth began to rumble restlessly and Kylara, the hard defiant lines of her face softening, turned to reassure her.

"See, you've made her uneasy and she's so near mating again."

T'bor looked dangerously close to an outburst which, as Weyrleader, he could not risk. Kylara's tactic was so obvious that F'lar wondered how the man could fall for it. Would it improve matters to have T'bor supplanted by one of the other bronze riders here? F'lar considered, as he had before, throwing Prideth's next mating flight into open competition. And yet, he owed T'bor too much for coping with this—this female to insult him by such a measure. On the other hand, maybe one of the more vigorous Oldtime bronzes with a rider just sufficiently detached from Kylara's ploys, and interested enough in retaining a Leadership, might keep her firmly in line.

"T'bor, the map of this continent's in the Weyrhall, isn't it?" F'lar asked, diverting the man. "I'd like to set the coordinates of this Fall in my mind . . ."

"Don't you like my queen?" Kylara asked, stepping forward and raising the lizard right under F'lar's nose.

The little creature, unbalanced by the sudden movement, dug her razor-sharp claws into Kylara's arm,

Prideth began to rumble restlessly and Kylara, the hard defiant lines of her face softening, turned to reassure her.

'See, you've made her uneasy and she's so near mating again.'

She glowered at T'bor and then swung round, raising her lizard to F'lar. 'Don't you like my queen?'

The little creature, unbalanced by the sudden movement, dug her razor-sharp claws into Kylara's arm,

Ch 9

P163 DelRey pb

As Canth settled down into long-distance flying, the rhythm began to soothe F'nor. What ought to have been a tedious journey became the blessing of uninterrupted time for reflection. And F'nor had much to think about.

The brown rider had noticed the widespread Thread-scoring. He had turned back bush after bush, heavily pitted by Threadmark, to find no trace of burrow at all in the swamp mud around them. Not once had he used his flame thrower. And the ground crews told him they had so little to do they wondered the Weyr called them at all. Many were from the fishing settlement and they were beginning to resent being taken from their labors, for they were trying to complete stone holds against the winter storms. They all preferred Southern to their old homes, though they did not complain against Tillek's Lord Oterel, or Lord Warbret of Ista.

RW p160 /Sp p160 /Corgi p208

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It had always amused F'nor that people he had scarcely met were willing to confide in him. One of the younger men, the ground crew chief, Torc, informed him that he'd staked out a sandy cove near his hold. It was almost inaccessible from the landside, but he'd seen certain fire-lizard sign. He was determined to Impress one and

It had always amused F'nor that people he had scarcely met were willing to confide in him, but he had found that this was often an advantage, despite the hours he'd had to spend listening to maundering tales. One of the younger men, the ground-crew chief, Toric, informed him that he'd staked out a sandy cove near his hold. It was almost inaccessible from the landside, but he'd seen certain fire-lizard signs. He was determined to Impress one and positive that he could, for he'd been lucky with watch-whers. He'd tried to convince Fort Weyr that he should have a chance at Impressing a dragon, but he hadn't been given the courtesy of seeing T'ron. Toric was quite bitter about weymen and, knowing (as everyone seemed to, F'nor had discovered) about the belt-knife fight, Toric expected F'nor to be disaffected, too. He was surprised when F'nor brusquely cut off his carping recital.

It was this curious ambivalence of Holder feeling toward dragonmen that occupied F'nor's thought. Holders claimed that weyrfolk held themselves aloof, acted patronizing or condescending, or plain arrogant in their presence. Yet there wasn't a man or woman, Holder or Crafter, who hadn't at one time or another wished he or she had Impressed a dragon. And in many this turned to bitter envy. Weyrmens insisted they were superior to commoners even while they consistently exhibited the same appetites as other men for material possessions and nubile women. Yet they did indeed refute the Crafter contention that dragonriding was a skill no more exacting than any craft on Pern, for in no other craft did a man risk life as a matter of course. And far worse, the loss of half his life. Reflexively, F'nor's thought sheered sharply away from any hint of threat to the great brown he rode.

The little queen stirred inside the heavy arm sling where he had been carrying her.

Young Toric, now, would lose some of his bitterness if he did Impress a fire lizard. He would feel that his claim was vindicated. And if fire lizards did take to anyone, and could carry messages back and forth, what a boon that would be. A lizard for everyone? That would be quite a battle cry. F'nor chortled as he thought of the Oldtimers' reactions to that. Do them good, it would, and he chuckled at the vision of T'ron trying to lure a fire lizard which ignored him to be Impressed by a lowly crafterchild. Something had

positive that he could, for he'd been lucky with watch-whers. There wasn't a man or woman, Holder or Crafter, F'nor often thought, who hadn't at one time or another wished he or she had Impressed a dragon. And in many this turned to bitter envy.

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Then F'nor remembered that he'd not had the chance to mention Brekke's problem to F'lar. And F'lar would probably have gone back to Benden Weyr by now. F'nor upbraided himself for what was downright interference. Comes from being a Wing-second so long, he thought. But, by the First Egg, F'nor hated to think of the scenes Kylara would subject Brekke to, if Orth flew WIRENTH.

Brekke wants to see you

better pierce the Oldtimers' blind parochiality. Yet even they, at a crucial moment in the sensitive awareness of adolescence, had appealed to dragonkind; they endured cold and possible death to fight an endless and mindless enemy. But there was more to living than that initial achievement and that eternal alert. Adolescence was only a step of life, not a career in itself. When one matured, one knew there was more to living.

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He grew restless with traveling and wasn't even amused when Canth began to croon soothingly. But when the journey was accomplished, and they were circling down into the late afternoon sun over Southern, he felt no fatigue. A few riders were feeding their beasts in the pasture and he inquired if Canth wished to be fed.

Brekke wants to see you,

Ch 10

P175 DelRey pb

ROBINTON, Masterharper of Pern, adjusted his tunic, the rich green pile of the fabric pleasing to the touch as well as the eye. He turned sideways, to check the fit of the tunic across his shoulders.

Masterweaver Zurg had compensated for his tendency to slouch, so the hem did not hike up. The gilded belt and the knife were just the proper dress accouterments.

Robinton grimaced at his reflection. "Belt knives!" He smoothed his hair behind his ears, then stepped back to check the pants.

Mastertanner Belesdan had surpassed himself. The fellis dye had turned toe soft wherhide into a deep green the same shade as the tunic. The boots were a shade darker. They fit snug to his calf and foot.

Green! Robinton grinned to himself. Neither Zurg nor Belesdan had been in favor of that shade, though it was easily obtainable. About

RW p168 /Sp p168 /Corgi p219

ROBINTON, WITH HIS apprentices Brudegan and Talmor, were conveyed to Telgar on the wedding day by N'ton's bronze which arrived in the air, facing the cliff-palisade that was Telgar Hold. The swift river that had its source in the great striding eastern range of mountains had cut

time we shed another ridiculous superstition, Robinton thought. He glanced out of his window, checking the sun's position. It was above the Fort range now. That meant midafternoon at Telgar Hold and the guests would be gathering. He'd been promised transport. T'ron of Fort Weyr had grudgingly acceded to that request, though it was a tradition of long standing that the Harper could request aid from any Weyr.

A dragon appeared in the northwest sky.

Robinton grabbed up his overcloak—the dress tunic would never keep out the full cold of between—his gloves and felted case that contained the best gitar. He'd hesitated about bringing it. Chad had a fine instrument at Telgar Hold, but fine wood and gut would not be chilled by those cold seconds of between as mere flesh would. When he passed the window, he noticed a second dragon winging down, and was mildly surprised.

By the time he reached the small court of the Harpercrafthall, he gave a snort of amusement. A third dragon had appeared from due east.

Never around when you want 'em, though. Robinton sighed, for it seemed the problems of the day had already begun, instead of waiting dutifully for him (as what trouble does?) at Telgar Hold, where he'd expected it.

Green, blue—and ah-ha—bronze dragon wings in the early morning sun.

"Sebell, Talmor, Brudegan, Tagetarl, into your fine rags. Hurry or I'll skin you and use your lazy innards for strings," Robinton called in a voice that projected into every room facing the Court.

Two heads popped out of an upper window of the apprentice barracks, two more at the journeyman's Hold.

"Aye, sir." "Coming, sir." "In a moment!"

Yes, with four harpers of his own, and the three at Telgar Hold—Sebell played the best bass line, not to mention Chad the Telgar Harper improvising in the treble—they'd have a grand loud group. Robinton tossed his overcloak to his shoulder, forgetting that the pile of the green tunic might crush, and grinned sardonically at the wheeling dragons. He half-expected them all to wink out again at the discovery of this multiplicity.

He should pick the Telgar Weyr blue on the grounds that he

appeared first. However, the green dragon came from Fort Weyr, to whom his Craft was weyrbound. Yet Benden Weyr did the honor of sending a bronze. Perhaps I should take the first to land, though they're all taking their time about it, he thought.

He stepped out of the Court quadrangle to the fields beyond, since it was obvious that's where the beasts were landing.

The bronze landed last, which canceled that method of impartial choice. The three riders met mid-field, some few dragonlengths from the disputed passenger. Each man began arguing his claim at once. When the bronze rider became the target of the other two, Robinton felt obliged to intervene.

"He's weyrbound to Fort Weyr. We have the right," said the green rider indignantly.

"He's guest of Telgar Hold. Lord Holder Larad himself requested . . ."

The bronze rider (Robinton recognized him as N'ton, one of the first non-weyrbred to Impress a dragon at Benden Weyr Turns ago) appeared neither angry nor disconcerted.

"The good Masterharper will know the right of it," and N'ton bowed graciously to Robinton.

The others gave him scarcely a glance but renewed their quarrel. "Why, there's no problem at all," Robinton said in the firm, decisive tone he rarely employed and which was never contradicted.

The two wranglers fell silent and faced him, the one sullen, the other indignant.

"Still, it does the Craft honor that you vie to serve it," and Robinton accorded the two dissidents an ironic bow. "Fortunately, I have need of three beasts. I've four more harpers to transport to Telgar Hold to grace the happy occasion." He emphasized the adjective, noticing the glares that passed between blue and green riders.

Young N'ton, though not weyrbred, had excellent manners.

"I was told to take you," the Fort Weyr man said in a sour voice.

"And took such joy of the assignment, it has made my morning merry," Robinton replied crisply. He saw the smug look on the blue rider's face. "And while I appreciate Weyrleader R'mart's thoughtfulness in spite of his recent—ah—problems at Telgar Hold, I shall ride the Benden Weyr dragon. For they do not grudge the Masterharper the prerogative."

His craftsmen came racing out of the Hall, riding cloaks askew on their shoulders, fitting their instruments in felt wrappings as they came. Robinton gave each a cursory glance as they came to a ragged line in front of him, breathless, flushed and, thank the Shell, happy. He nodded toward Sebell's pants, indicated that Talmor should adjust his twisted belt, approved Brudegan's immaculate appearance, and murmured that Tagetarl was to smooth his wild hair.

"We're ready, sirs," Robinton announced and, giving a curt bow of his head to the other riders, turned on his heel to follow N'ton.

"I've half a mind—" the green rider began.

"Obviously," Robinton cut in, his voice as cold as between and as menacing as Thread. "Brudegan, Tagetarl, ride with him. Sebell, Talmor, on the blue."

Robinton watched as Brudegan, with no expression on his face, gestured politely to the shorter, green rider to precede them. Of all men on Pern, harpers feared few. Any one deliberately antagonizing them for no cause found himself the butt of a satirical tune which would be played around the land.

There were no further protests. And Robinton was rather pleased to notice that N'ton gave no indication that there'd been any display of ill nature.

Robinton on N'ton's bronze arrived in the air,

glad that his rank gave him a sure place. A little crowded perhaps because he'd brought four more harpers. They might be superfluous; every harper who could must have wangled his way in here today. Maybe it would be a happy occasion, after all.

I'll concentrate on positive, happy thoughts, Robinton mused to himself, coining Fandarel's phrase. "You'll be staying on, N'ton?"

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Lytol broke off as the Harper stared at him. "You didn't hear? The messenger went through Ruatha Hold yesterday, bound for Fort Hold and your Crafthall."

"He missed me or—was he free with his news?"

"To me, yes. I seem to attract confidences . . ."

"Fire lizard? What about them?"

glad that his rank gave him a sure place. 'You'll be staying on, N'ton?' Robinton asked the bronze rider.

RW p172 /Sp p172 /Corgi p224

Lytol broke off as the Harper stared at him.
'Fire lizard?

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He gave a shrug. "It makes more sense with Thread falling out of phase and the Crom Hold demoralized. We used to do it in the Oldtime when a Weyr was understrength. In fact, I flew with Benden one season as a weyrling."

"I'm certain that Crom

RW p175 /Sp p175 /Corgi p228

He gave a shrug.
"I'm certain that Crom

Ch 12

P227 DelRey pb

"There're enough, I know." And F'lar ticked them off on his fingers. "Protection of Pern while all the Weyrs are away—which might well mean the grubs on the land and a well-organized ground crew to take care of homes and people. Dragons big enough, intelligent enough to aid us. You've noticed yourself that our dragons are both bigger and smarter than those four hundred Turns older. If the dragons were bred for this purpose from creatures like Grall, they didn't grow to present size in the course of just a few Hatchings. Any more than the Masterherdsman could breed those long-staying long-legged runners he's finally developed; it's a project that I understand started about four hundred Turns ago. G'narish says they didn't have them in the Oldtime."

There was an undercurrent to F'lar's voice, F'nor suddenly realized. The man was not as certain of this outrageous notion as he sounded. And yet, wasn't the recognized goal of dragonmen the complete extermination of all Thread from the skies of Pern? Or was it? There wasn't a line of the Teaching Ballads and Sagas that even suggested more than that the dragonmen prepare and guard Pern when the Red Star passed. Nothing hinted at a time when there would be no Thread to fight.

"Isn't it just possible that we, now,

RW p213 /Sp p213 /Corgi p276

'There's enough, I know. Isn't it just possible that we, now,

Ch 13

P248 DelRey pb

thighs in unconscious agitation.

"Surely that's an advantage if she's suicidal?"

"Brekke is not—not actively suicidal. She's craftbred, you know," Lessa said in a flat, disapproving tone of voice.

RW p231 /Sp p231 /Corgi p299

thighs in unconscious agitation. 'She can't actively seek death

"No, I didn't know," Robinton murmured encouragingly after a pause. He was thinking that Lessa wouldn't ever contemplate suicide in a similar circumstance and wondered what Brekke's "breeding" had to do with a suicidal aptitude.
"That's her trouble. She can't actively seek death

P260 DelRey pb

brave smile. "But there are hundreds of innocent people on his lands, and many more about him, who cannot be permitted to suffer because of his—his—how shall I phrase it—his turn behavior."

"Which leads me to ask," Groghe said, hastily clearing his throat. "what is being done with that—that Kylara woman?"
"Nothing," Lessa said in a flat hard voice, trusting that would end the matter.

"Nothing?" Groghe was incensed. "She caused the death of two queens and you're doing nothing . . ."

"Are the Lord Holders doing anything about out Meson?" she asked, glancing sternly at the four present. There was a long silence. "I must return to Benden Weyr. The dawn and another day's watch come all too soon there. We're keeping Wansor Fandarel from the observations that will make it possible for us to go to that Star."

"Before they monopolize the thing, I'd like another look," Oterel of Tillek said loudly. "My eyes are keen . . ."
Lessa was tired as she called Ramoth to her. She wanted go back to Benden Weyr, not so much to sleep as to Benden herself about F'lar. Mnementh was with him, true, and he'd have reported any change in his rider's condition . . .

And I'd've told you Ramoth said, sounding a little

"Lessa," the Harper's low voice reached her, "are you in favor of that expedition?"

She looked up at him, his face lighted by the path glows. His expression was neutral and she wondered if he'd really meant what he'd said back at the Star Rocks. He disabled so easily, and so often against his own inclination, that she sometimes wondered what his candid thoughts were.

"It scares me. It scares me

RW p243 /Sp p243 /Corgi p314

brave smile.
"Which leads me to ask," Groghe said, hastily clearing his throat, "what is being done with that—that Kylara woman?"
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"Nothing?" Groghe was incensed. "She caused the deaths of two queens and you're doing nothing . . ."
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Lessa was tired as she called Ramoth to her. She wanted to go back to Benden Weyr, not so much to sleep as to reassure herself about F'lar.
"Lessa," the Harper's low voice reached her, "are you in favour of that expedition?"
"It scares me. It scares me

P262 DelRey pb

with fellis fruit juice.

"I want F'nor," he said petulantly.

Lessa looked down at him for the coughing spasm had left him limp.

"If we can pry him away from Brekke."

F'lar's lips set in a thin line.

"You mean, only you, F'lar, Benden Weyrleader, can flout tradition?" she asked.

"That isn't . . ."

"If it's your pet project you're worrying about, I had N'ton secure Thread . . ."

"N'ton?" F'lar's eyes flew open in surprise.

"Yes. He's a good lad and, from what I heard at Fort Weyr last night, very deft in being exactly where he is needed, unobtrusively."

"And . . .?"

"And? Well, when the next queen at Fort Weyr rises, he'll undoubtedly take the Leadership. Which is what you intended, isn't it?"

"I don't mean that. I mean, the Thread."

Lessa felt her guts turn over at the memory.

RW p244 ☑/Sp p244 ☑/Corgi p316 ☑

Instantly Lessa was at his side, offering him distilled wine, sweetened and laced with fellis fruit juice.

'If it's your pet project you're worrying about, I had N'ton secure Thread—'

'N'ton?' F'lar's eyes flew open in surprise.

'Yes.'

'And . . .?'

Lessa felt her guts turn over at the memory.

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"But it is still too far away to make out any details," Lessa said firmly.

F'lar shot her an annoyed look "If I could only see for myself . . ."

Wansor looked up brightly. "Well, now, you know, I had about figured out how to utilize the lenses from the magnifier. Of course, there'd be no such maneuverability as one can achieve with the ancient device, but the advantage is that I could set up those lenses on your own Star Stones. It's rather interesting, too, because if I put one lens in the Eye Rock and set the other on the Finger Rock, you will see—or, but then you won't see, will you?" And the little man seemed to deflate.

"Won't see what?"

"Well, those rocks are situated to catch the Red Star only at winter solstice, so of course the angles are wrong for any other time of

RW p248 ☑/Sp p248 ☑/Corgi p320 ☑

But it is still too far away to make out any details,' Lessa said firmly. F'lar shot her an annoyed look.

'There is no way to go between to the Red Star?

year. But then, I could—no," Wansor's face was puckered with his intense frown. Only his eyes moved, restlessly, as the myriad thoughts he was undoubtedly sifting were reflected briefly. "I will think about it. But I am sure that I can devise a means of your seeing the Red Star, Weyrleader, without moving from Benden."

"You must be exhausted, Wansor," Lessa said, before F'lar could ask another question.

"Oh, not to mention," Wansor replied, blinking hard to focus on her. "Enough to mention," Lessa said firmly and took the cup from his hand, half-lifting him from the stool. "I think, Master Wansor, that you had better sleep here at Benden a little while."

"Oh, could I? I'd the most fearful notion that I might fall off the dragon between. But that couldn't happen, could it? Oh, I can't stay. I have the Craft's dragon. Really, perhaps I'd just better . . ."

His voice trailed off as Lessa led him down the corridor.

"He was up all last night too," N'ton said, grinning affectionately after Wansor

"There is no way to go between to the Red Star?"

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"I'm sure you'll find it, sir, when you're feeling better."

F'lar grimaced, thinking that "unobtrusive" was an apt description of this young man. He had deftly expressed confidence in his superior, that only ill-health prevented immediate action, and that the ill-health was a passing thing.

"Since that's the way matters stand in that direction, let us proceed in another. Lessa said that you procured Thread for us. Did you see how those swampgrubs dealt with Thread?"

N'ton nodded slowly, his eyes glittering.

"If we hadn't had to cede the dissidents the continent, I'd've had a straight-flown Search discover the boundaries of the southern lands. We still don't know its extent. Exploration was stopped on the west by the deserts, and on the east by the sea. But it can't be just the swampy area that is infested with these grubs." F'lar shook his head. He sounded querulous to himself. He took a breath, forcing himself to speak more slowly and therefore less emotionally. "There's been Threadfall in the Southern Weyr for seven Turns and not a single burrow. The ground crews have never had to flame out anything. Now, even with the most careful, most experienced, sharpest-eyed riders, some Thread gets to the ground. T'bor insists there were never any burrows to be found anywhere after a Threadfall." F'lar grimaced. 'His wings are efficient and Threadfall is light in the south, but I wished I'd known.'

RW p248 /Sp p248 /Corgi p321

'I'm sure you'll find it, sir, when you're feeling better.'

F'lar grimaced. 'Lessa said that you procured Thread for us. Did you see how those swampgrubs dealt with Thread?'

N'ton nodded slowly, his eyes glittering.

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"And what would you have thought?" asked Lessa with her usual asperity as she rejoined them. "Nothing. Because until Thread started falling out of phase, and you had been at the swampfall, you'd never have correlated the information."

She was right, of course, but N'ton didn't have to look so torn between agreement with her and sympathy for him. Silently F'lar railed at this infuriating debility. He ought to be up and around, not forced to rely on the observations of others at a crucial time like this.

"Sir, in the Turns I've been a dragonrider," said N'ton, considering his words even as he spoke, "I've learned that nothing is done without purpose. I used to call my sire foolish to insist that one

tanned leather in just one way, or stretched hide only a little at a time, well-soaked, but I've realized recently that there is an order, a reason, a rhyme for it" He paused, but F'lar urged him to go on.

"I've been most interested in the methods of the Mastersmith. That man thinks constantly." The young man's eyes shone with such intense admiration that F'lar grinned. "I'm afraid I may be making a nuisance of myself but I learned so much from him. Enough to realize that there're gaps in the knowledge that's been transmitted down to us. Enough to understand that perhaps the southern continent was abandoned to let the grubs grow in strength there . . ."

"You mean, that if the ancients knew they couldn't get to the Red Star," Lessa exclaimed, "they developed the grubs to protect growing fields?"

"They developed the dragons from fire lizards, didn't they? Why not grubs as ground crews?" And N'ton grinned at the whimsy of his thesis.

"That makes sense," Lessa said, looking hopefully at F'lar. "Certainly that explains why the dragons haven't jumped between to the red star. They didn't need to. Protection was being provided."

'Sir,' said N'ton, considering his words even as he spoke, 'is it possible that perhaps the southern continent was abandoned to let the grubs grow in strength there ...'

'You mean, that if the ancients knew they couldn't get to the Red Star,' Lessa exclaimed, 'they developed the grubs to protect growing fields?'

'They developed the dragons from fire lizards, didn't they? Why not grubs as ground crews?' And N'ton grinned at the whimsy of his thesis.

'Then why don't we have grubs here in the north?'

"Then why don't we have grubs here in the north?

Ch 14

P271 DelRey pb

unnerved the entire Hold. Even the new baby didn't cry. It was bad, very bad, to lose one queen, Jaxom knew, but to lose two, in such a horrible way! It was almost as if things were pointing toward even direr events. Jaxom was scared, a deep voiceless feeling in his bones. He almost dreaded seeing Felessan. He had never shaken off his sense of blasphemy for invading the Hatching Ground, and wondered if this were his punishment. But he was a logical boy and the death of the two queens had not occurred at Ruatha, not over Fort Weyr to which Ruatha Hold was bound. He'd never met Kylara or Brekke. He did know F'nor and felt sorry for him if half what he'd heard was true—that F'nor had taken Brekke into his weyr and had abandoned his duties as a Wing-second to care for her. She was very sick. Funny, everyone was sorry for Brekke but no one mentioned Kylara, and she'd lost a queen, too. Jaxom wondered about that but knew he couldn't ask. Just as he couldn't ask if he and Lytol were really going to the Hatching. Why else would the Weyrleader send them word? And wasn't Talina a Ruathan candidate for the queen egg? Ruatha ought to be represented at the Hatching. Benden Weyr always had open Impressions, even when the other Weyrs didn't. And he hadn't seen Felessan in ages. Not that anyone had done much more than Thread-watch since the wedding at Telgar.

Jaxom sighed. That had been some day. He shivered, remembered how sick, cold and—yes—how scared he'd been. (Lytol said a man wasn't afraid to admit to fear.) All the time he'd watched F'lar fighting T'ron, he'd been scared. He shuddered again, his spine rippling with reaction to that memory. Everything was going wrong on Pern. Dragon queens killing each other, Weyrleaders dueling in public, Thread falling here and there, with no rhyme or reason. Order had slipped away from life; the constants that made his routine were dissolving, and he was powerless to stop the inexorable slide. It wasn't fair. Everything had been going so well. Everyone had been saying how Ruatha Hold had improved. Now, this past six days, they'd lost that northeastern farmhold and, if

RW p251 /Sp p251 /Corgi p324

unnerved the entire Hold.

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Funny, everyone was sorry for Brekke but no-one mentioned Kylara, and she'd lost a queen, too.

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Since then everything was going wrong on Pern. Dragon queens killing each other, Weyrleaders duelling in public, Thread falling here and there, with no rhyme or reason. Order had slipped away from life; the constants that made his routine were dissolving, and he was powerless to stop the inexorable slide.

'Lord Jaxom,' gasped a breathless

things kept up, there wouldn't be much left of all Lytol's hard work. Maybe that's why he was acting so—so odd. But it wasn't fair. Lytol had worked so hard. And now, it looked as though Jaxom was going to miss the Hatching and see who impressed that littlest egg. It wasn't at all fair.

"Lord Jaxom," gasped a breathless

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his eyes dancing. "Look at them!" and he pointed out three boys, all with the Nerat device on their chests. "They look as if they smelled something unpleasant. You don't think dragons smell, do you?"

"No, of course not. Only a little and it's pleasant. They aren't candidates, are they?" Jaxom asked, disgusted.

"Nooo. Candidates wear white." Felessan made a grimace for Jaxom's ignorance. "They don't come in till later. Ooops! And later may be sooner. Didja see that egg rock?"

The motion had been observed,

RW p254 /Sp p254 /Corgi p328

his eyes dancing. 'Didja see that egg rock?' The motion had been observed,

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begged for reassurance.

"No, touching 'em doesn't hurt 'em. The candidates've been touching 'em for weeks and they're rocking."

"Why isn't that one then?"

Jaxom had difficulty making Felessan understand him for the humming had increased until it was a constant, exciting thrum reverberating back and forth across the Hatching Ground.

"I dunno," Felessan shrugged diffidently.

RW p255 /Sp p255 /Corgi p329

begged for reassurance.
'I dunno,' Felessan shrugged diffidently.

Ch 15

P284 DelRey pb

patting her shoulders, stroking her until he began to fear that the convulsions would tear her apart. He beckoned urgently to Manora.

"She's got to cry, F'nor. It'll be an easing for her."

Manora's anxious expression, the way she folded and unfolded her hands, was strangely reassuring to F'nor. She, too, cared about Brekke, cared enough to let concern pierce that imperturbable serenity. He'd been so grateful to Manora for opposing a re-

RW p262 /Sp p262 /Corgi p337

patting her shoulders, stroking her.
'I felt you there, both of you,

Impression, though he doubted his blood mother knew why he'd be against it. Or perhaps she did. Manora in her calm detachment missed few nuances or evasions.

Brekke's frail body was trembling violently now, torn apart by the paroxysm of her grief. The fire lizards took to fluttering anxiously and Canth's croon held on a distressed note. Brekke's hands opened and closed pathetically on his shoulders but the tearing sobs did not permit her to speak.

"She can't stop, Manora. She can't"

"Slap her."

"Slap her?"

"Yes, slap her," and Manora suited actions to words, fetching Brekke several sharp blows before F'nor could shield her face.

"Now into the bathing pool with her. The water's warm enough to relax those muscles."

"You didn't have to slap her," F'nor said, angrily.

"She did, she did," said Brekke in a ragged gasp, shuddering as they bundled her into the warm pool water. Then she felt the heat penetrate and relax muscles knotted by racking sobs. As soon as she felt Brekke's body easing, Manora dried her with warmed towels and gestured for F'nor to tuck her back under the furs.

"She needs feeding up now, F'nor. And so do you," she said, looking sternly at him. "And you are kindly remember that you've duties to others tonight. It's Impression Day."

F'nor snorted at Manora's reminder and saw Brekke smiling wanly up at him.

"I don't think you've left me at all since . . ."

"Canth and I needed to be with you, Brekke," he cut in when she faltered. He smoothed her hair back from her forehead as if such an action were the most important occupation in the world. She caught his hand and he looked into her eyes.

"I felt you there, both of you

P289 DelRey pb

Jaxom had Impressed a sport dragon that hadn't a chance in Threadfall of surviving! How could you make an honorific out of Jaxom? J'om, J'xom? Most weyrwomen chose names for their sons that could be contracted decently. Then Lessa was amused to be

RW p265 ☑/Sp p265 ☑/Corgi p342 ☑

Jaxom had Impressed a sport dragon that hadn't a chance in Threadfall of surviving! Just like men to make a piece of work over something so simple. The little beast would not survive. He was too small, his colour - who ever heard of a white dragon? - indicated

worrying over how to shorten a name, a trivial detail in this dilemma. No, Jaxom must remain at Ruatha Hold. She'd relinquished her Bloodright on Ruatha Hold to him, Gemma's son, because he was Gemma's son and had at least some minute quantity of Ruathan Blood. She certainly would contest the Hold going to any other Bloodline. Too bad Lytol had no sons. No, Jaxom must remain as Lord Holder at Ruatha. Just like men to make a piece of work over something so simple. The little beast would not survive. He was too small, his color—who ever heard of a white dragon?—indicated other abnormalities. Manora'd mentioned that white-skinned, pink-eyed child from Nerat Hold who hadn't been able to endure daylight. A nocturnal dragon?

Obviously Ruth would never grow to full size; new-hatched, he was more like a large fire lizard.

Ramoth rumbled from the heights, disturbed by her rider's thoughts, and Lessa sent a hundred apologies to her.

"It's no reflection on you, darling," Lessa told her. "Why, you've spawned more queens than any other three. And the largest of their broods is no better than the smallest of yours, love."

Ruth will prosper,

other abnormalities. Manora'd mentioned that white-skinned, pink-eyed child from Nerat Hold who hadn't been able to endure daylight. A nocturnal dragon?

Ruth will prosper,

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"Dragon and his rider both belong in the Weyr," Raid said. "You don't change what's natural for man and beast"

"Well now, take these fire lizards," Sifer began, nodding toward the two across the table from him, in the arms of the Lord and Lady of Lemos Hold. "They're dragons of a sort, after all."

Raid snorted. "We saw today what happens when you go against natural courses. The girl—whatever her name is lost her queen."

Well, even the fire lizard warned her off Impressing a new one. The creatures know more than we think they do. Look at all the years people've tried to catch 'em . . ."

"Catch 'em now, in nestsful," Sifer interrupted him. "Pretty things they are. Must say I look forward to mine hatching."

Somehow their quarreling reminded Lessa of old R'gul and S'llel, her first "teachers" in the Weyr, contradicting themselves endlessly as they purportedly taught her "all she'd need to know to become a Weyrwoman." It was F'lar who had done that.

RW p267 ☑/Sp p267 ☑/Corgi p344 ☑

'Dragon and his rider both belong in the Weyr,' Raid said. 'You don't change what's natural for man and beast.'

'The boy in question is a Lord Holder, Raid,'

"Boy has to stay here with that dragon."
"The boy in question is a Lord Holder, Raid,"

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"She's asleep," he said. "I told you she wouldn't Impress." Lessa made an impatient gesture. "At least the experience snapped her out of that shock." "Yes," and there was a wealth of relief in the man's soft affirmative. "So, you'd better come with me to the Rooms. I want to find out why Masterfarmer Andemon has just flown in. And it's about time you got back to work!" F'nor chuckled. "It is, if someone else has been doing my work. Did anyone bring F'lar his Threads?" There was a note in his voice that told Lessa he was concerned. "N'ton did!"

"I thought he was riding Wing-second to P'zar at Fort Weyr!" "As you remarked the other morning, whenever you're not here to keep him under control, F'lar rearranges matters." She saw his stricken look and caught his arm, smiling up at him reassuringly; he wasn't up to teasing yet. "No one could take your place with F'lar—or me. Canth and Brekke needed you more for a while." She gave his hand a squeeze. "But that doesn't mean things haven't been happening and you'd better catch up. N'ton's been included in our affairs because F'lar had a sudden glimpse of his mortality when he was sick and decided to stop being secretive. Or it might be another four hundred Turns or so before we control Thread."

She gathered her skirt so she could move more rapidly over the sandy floor.

"Can I come, too?" asked the Harper.

"You? Sober enough to walk that far?"

Robinton chuckled, smoothing his rumpled hair back into place at his neck. "Lytol couldn't drink me drunk, my dear Lady Lessa. Only the Smith has the—ah—capacity."

There was no doubt that he was steady on his feet as the three walked toward the glow-marked entrance to the Rooms. The stars were brilliant in the soft black spring sky, and the glows on the lower levels threw bright circles of light on the sands. Above, on weyr ledges, dragons watched with gleaming opalescent eyes,

RW p271 ☑/Sp p271 ☑/Corgi p349 ☑

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When they entered the Rooms,

occasionally humming with pleasure. High up, Lessa saw three dragon silhouettes by the Star Stones: Ramoth and Mnementh were perched to the right of the watchdragon, their wings overlapping. They were both smug tonight; she'd heard Ramoth's tenor often that evening. It was such a relief to have her in an agreeable mood for a while. Lessa rather hoped there'd be a long interval before the queen felt the urge to mate again.

When they entered the Rooms,

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"They're as pernicious and indestructible as Igen sandworms and not half as useful. Why, let them get into a field and every plant begins to droop and die."

"There's not an unhealthy plant here," F'lar protested, gesturing at the burgeoning growths all around.

Andemon stared at him. F'lar moved, grabbing a handful of soil from each tub as he circled, showing the grubs as proof.

"It's impossible," Andemon insisted, the shadow of his earlier fear returning.

"Don't you recall, F'lar," Lessa said, "when we first brought the grubs here, the plants did seem to droop?"

"They recovered. All they needed was water!"

"They couldn't!" Andemon forgot his revulsion enough to dig into another tub as if to prove to himself that F'lar was wrong. "There're no grubs in this one!" he said in triumph.

"That's never had any. I used it to check the others. And I must say, the plants don't look as green or healthy as the other tubs."

Andemon stared around. "Those grubs are pests. We've been trying to rid ourselves of them for hundreds of Turns."

"Then I suspect, good Master Andemon,"

RW p272 /Sp p272 /Corgi p31

'They're as pernicious and indestructible as Igen sandworms and not half as useful.'

'Then I suspect, good Master Andemon,

P304 DelRey pb

She's been ill. Losing one's dragon is a tremendous shock. She has made the adjustment. She won't commit suicide now."

The Masterfarmer halted, staring at F'nor. "That would be unthinkable."

Lessa caught F'nor's eye and he remembered he was talking to a commoner.

RW p278 /Sp p278 /Corgi p358

'She's been ill. Losing one's dragon is a tremendous shock. She has made the adjustment.'

'Ah, does she have any position at all now?'

"Yes, of course, but the loss is unsettling."

"Certainly. Ah, does she have any position at all now?"

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P311 DelRey pb

"It's a sight, I assure you," Asgenar said. "I've become fascinated with the study and if," he grinned, his thin face suddenly all creases and teeth, "Wansor ever has time to duplicate that distance-viewer, I want one on Lemos' fire height We're at a good altitude to see the northern heavens. I'd like to see those showering stars we get every summer through a distance-viewer!"

Larad snorted at the notion.

"No, it's fascinating," Asgenar protested, his eyes dancing with enthusiasm. Then he added in a different tone

RW p284 ☑/Sp p284 ☑/Corgi p366 ☑

It's a sight, I assure you,' Asgenar said. 'I've become fascinated with the study.'

Then he added in a different tone

P320 DelRey pb

I'm only imagining things. I'm as tired as—as we all are."

"You're right there, Lessa," F'nor agreed. "We're all seeing problems which don't exist. After all, no Lord Holder has come to Benden Weyr and thrown down any ultimatum. What could they do? F'lar certainly has been forthright, explained the project of grub protection so often I'll be ill if I have to listen to it once more.

Certainly he's been open with the other Weyrleaders, the Craftmasters, being sure that everyone knows exactly what the over-all plan is. Nothing will go wrong this time. This is one Craft secret that won't get lost because someone can't read a Record skin!"

Lessa rose, her body taut.

RW p291 ☑/Sp p291 ☑/Corgi p376 ☑

I'm only imagining things. I'm as tired as – as we all are.'

F'nor agreed. 'We're all seeing problems which don't exist. After all, no Lord Holder has come to Benden Weyr and thrown down any ultimatum. What could they do? F'lar certainly has been forthright with the other Weyrleaders, the Craftmasters, being sure that everyone knows exactly what the overall plan is.'

Lessa rose, her body taut.